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DATE: September 3, 2001

TO: Regional Directors
Local Agent Health Departments
Attn: Environmental Sanitation Sanitarians

FROM: Gregory A. Pallaske, M.S., R.S., Chief
Environmental Sanitation Section
Bureau of Environmental Health

SUBJECT: Fairgrounds

By now, you are all aware of the E-coli outbreak that occurred recently at the Ozaukee County Fair. Potentially close to 200 people became ill from contact with the organism either in the petting zoo or in the cow barn. It wasn't necessary to actually touch the cows, just objects in the barn itself.

Apparently, these individuals who had contacted the organism then failed to wash their hands before eating, drinking, smoking, or exhibiting pica behavior. This led to illness.

The question we were asked is "why don't you people regulate these things?"

Obviously we can't begin to regulate animal exhibits at every event in Wisconsin. But there are a few things we can do when inspecting county or regional fairs:

1. Try to meet with the fair organizers/coordinators before the fair begins to discuss potential problems.
2. Encourage an abundance of warning signs advising fair-goers to wash their hands after visiting an animal display.
3. Advise the operators to provide ample hand-washing opportunities.
4. Evaluate the cow washing station. Where will the waste flow? Will the public be in contact with this area?
5. Finally, use your common sense combined with your education and experience. There may be no code for cow barns and petting zoos, but our job is not to enforce codes anyway- it is to PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH. If you think a situation is potentially dangerous, speak up and tell the operators. These folks are frightened of the consequences of sickening the public - they'll listen to you.
6. When in doubt, call someone - an experienced sanitarian from your region, or someone from the central office - remember, we're here for you.